

Europe: Live From the Dark

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Whether it's more or less the case than today is arguable, but the 1980s spawned all sorts of radio chart-toppers from seemingly interchangeable bands who now tour in equally transposable fashion, trolling for the same dollars of nostalgia. One such group: Europe.

Born in Sweden, Europe started out as a prog-rock band but eventually morphed into a sort of hair-metal/pop hybrid, churning out bombastic, synthesizer-fueled hard rock numbers. Comprised of founding members Joey Tempest on vocals, John Norum on guitar and John Leven on bass, Europe released two decently received albums in their native land in the early '80s

before finally striking it big with their third disc. With drummer Ian Haugland and keyboardist Michael Michaeli added to the mix, the driving, propulsive title track from *The Final Countdown* took radio charts across the world by storm, additionally becoming an early arena rock anthem. Presented from a more removed perspective, the superlative *Europe: Live From the Dark* recounts this glorified heyday while also showcasing an 18-song performance from the reformed band's 2004 concert tour.

Recorded in crisp Dolby digital 5.1 surround sound at the famed Carling Apollo Hammersmith Theatre in London, the show features the aforementioned hit, "Superstitious," "Wings of Tomorrow," "Let the Good Times Rock," "Hero," "Sign of the Times," "Rock the Night," "Got to Have Faith" and "Ready or Not," among other tunes. It's an energetic, straightforwardly produced set, and while Europe may not be U2 or the Rolling Stones, they definitely belie the notion that younger is automatically better when it comes to rock 'n' roll.

The second disc of this set is where the real fun begins, though. A 23-minute, behind-the-scenes featurette kicks things off, documenting arena arrivals and tour travels, including a middle-of-the-night crossing of the English Channel. Techies will delight at the breakdown of the 270-plus soundboard console controls, and fan interviews are a further nice touch. Little pop-up trivia and factoids likewise do a great job of conveying the details of the tour. Apparently taking a note from HBO's *Taxicab Confessions*, there are also a whopping 75 minutes of separate backseat interviews with band members as they head the show presented here, all rendered in artful black and white. These chats give a great overview of Europe both then and now, with Haugland in particular offering up superb insight with regards to grunge's obliteration of '80s-style rock, the necessity of the band's split ("After so long on the road together, we were just living up our own asses") and the pleasure of their reunion. Another 15 minutes of on-stage interviews showcase in detail the band's instruments, and bonus sound-check performances of "Heart of Stone" and "Spirit of the Underdog" are tight and lively.

While more with guitarist Kee Marcello — who replaced Norum from 1986 to '92 or so — would have been interesting, *Europe: Live From the Dark* is near peerless in the nostalgic concert DVD canon, offering up a solid new show with plenty of self-analysis and other material from the band's past — just the sort of mix both diehard and merely curious fans can enjoy in equal measure. A handful of music videos, biographies, videographies and discographies round out this well-produced release. **B (Show) A (Disc)**

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